

Plateau Country Trail Proposal

AQUARIUS TRAIL & HUT TO HUT SYSTEM

Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YlFWbsyPWXI>

Outline of proposed land use: The Aquarius Trail and Hut to Hut System is ideally situated to become a national level destination trail system. In addition to the ideal natural resources of Color County, the existing tourism draw to Bryce Canyon, Zion, and the Escalante National Monument, and close proximity to major metropolitan areas within a 5-6 hours drive; the Aquarius Trail and Hut to Hut System is the right step forward in establishing Southwest Utah as a leader in purpose-built, carefully designed & managed outdoor recreation experiences in America. By establishing an intentionally designed trail system connecting the nearby established communities of Brianhead, Hatch, Panguitch, and Escalante have the potential to fill the missing piece of the draw of adventure travel in the Southwest Utah.

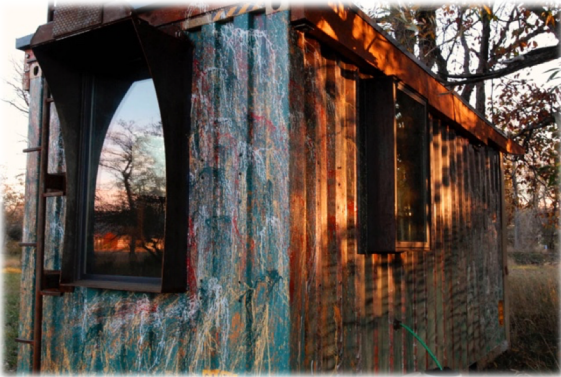


Figure 1 Customized Hut

The Aquarius Trail and Hut to Hut system will invite enthusiasts alike; mountain bikers, hikers, horseback riders, etc. to the region for an extended period of time, encouraging local business interaction and creating place value for visitors and residents alike. The trail and hut to hut system also have the potential to drive many other trail driven outdoor pursuits and events. Within this trail network we would offer hut accommodation, uniting the motivation of land use relative to local businesses and nearby communities with that of the USFS that will also generate a passive revenue stream/stimulate local economies and create the first hut to hut system in Utah. It is our intent to draw on the existing recognition of the region as an outdoor mecca to grow the existing market by offering an extended trail network, with the capacity for day use, trail driven events, multi-day use, bike touring, through-hiking, etc. Linking Brianhead to Escalante would mutually enhance economies and further permit growth of nature based tourism strategies.

Summary of Project: A plan to establish the Aquarius Trail and Hut to Hut System as a cycling destination via the creation (re-marking and repurposing of existing roads & trails) of one of America's best multi-purpose trail systems, and the implementation of Utah's first "hut to hut" lodging system, connecting key communities and introducing an important ingredient to help land owners and managers manage sustainable tourism. This project encourages adventure tourism that will provide a national audience with a reason for a lengthened stay in the region and will also invite a wider audience of international enthusiasts and recreational guests to travel to this region of Southern Utah.

How? Complete the Aquarius Trail and Hut to Hut System via the marking of the trail and the use of connections to surrounding/existing trail systems and build hosting facilities to support national & international guests via the implementation of Utah's first hut-to-hut Lodging System.

Outline the anticipated land requirements, both as to area and location: This new Aquarius trail network and hut to hut system can co-exist with other land management efforts with little, if any, impact on their ability to operate efficiently. The strength of this adventure tourism-based proposal is that it can happily work in harmony, share and enhance some facilities with most other operators once key communications are made. Ideally for a world-class facility to be attractive to a large audience it will need *altitude, quality scenery and quality trail* of a varied degree that will attract the enthusiast all the way down to the beginner and family user. One of the key aspects of this proposal is that the trail network can be linked in with existing tourism operators in the region. It is important to link towns and communities as these linkages will be an important component to driving healthy communities both physically and financially. This also has the ability to be the catalyst to sustainable eco-tourism in the region going forward.



Figure 2 Inside the Hut



Figure 3- Transporting the Huts

Indicative requirements for services and other infrastructure, including existing: The purpose of this proposal is to utilize local services and infrastructure, to bring light to the existing natural resources that the communities are proud of. The Aquarius Trail and hut to hut system is a resource that the region can hang their hat on and that investment will spill forth from. Trail projects such as the Aquarius Trail and hut to hut system are numbered, and highly sought after because of the unique forest experiences they offer. IT will also continue to support the existing efforts to market Utah as an international outdoor recreation destination. The Aquarius trail and hut to hut system can easily be accurately marked and requires minimal initial trail construction. Most existing trail and roads will be utilized and fortunately, the larger part of the trail system is already highly attractive to the enthusiast trail-user. The suggested “huts” have been carefully designed and built out of repurposed shipping containers and will be carefully located (please see

attached hut locations below). The huts require no foundation, are sustainable and easily removable. Linking these huts to iconic areas such as the Tropic Reservoir, and Thunder Mountain Trail, that have an existing brand for trail-based recreation already, will further attract adventure tourism to the region, specifically in areas/communities that intentionally choose to embrace the prospective tourism opportunities. The Aquarius Trail and hut system can be a catalyst to create strong recreational trail programs for this portion of the Dixie National Forest, more specifically the Escalante District where the community is openly excited about inviting more adventure tourism opportunities.

Forecasting the longer term, we might consider strategies for improving access by means of creating an easy trail to the individual towns would be key to encourage travelers to utilize the town business’s and facilities an example of this might be a trail from Casto Canyon to Panguitch, or Posey Lake to Escalante. We understand that to achieve the right outcomes we will need to work together in a collaborative understanding that will support the region development for a lasting, sustainable impact.

Outline of financial capacity, and ability to fund this proposal: To create a sustainable future for this region we are going to need investment support from local, state and federal governments to stimulate the economies in this region, to entice people and investment back into the region and to create jobs and opportunity. Color County has the potential and advantages in becoming a national leader of trails-based outdoor recreation with exceptional scenery, history and natural resources. With some intentional investment in the simple creation of the Aquarius Trail and lodging infrastructure via the huts, a cohesive strategy for the future and region wide votes of confidence, the continued investment will soon follow. Escape Adventures is excited to lead the project and be a part of finding key partners and resources to see the project from concept through to fruition. Initial steps involve planning the detailed trail design and trail marking as well as strategic hut placement.

How will this project be economically viable? The proposed Aquarius Trail and Hut to Hut system can be compared to the year-round mountain biking, skiing and hiking-based San Juan Hut System in Colorado. The San Juan Hut System has been successful for 25 years now and was designed so that trail enthusiasts can travel hut-to-hut, or just reserve a single hut for an out and back experience. The hut system was inspired by European and Canadian traditions of extended trail travel where the huts are managed by a concessionaire using a simple online database. There are many ways for the trails to drive economic activity, but the region will need to identify what is feasible and what needs to happen in order to justify the energy and resource expenditure of this trails project.



Figure 4 Huts Hosting Educational Opportunities

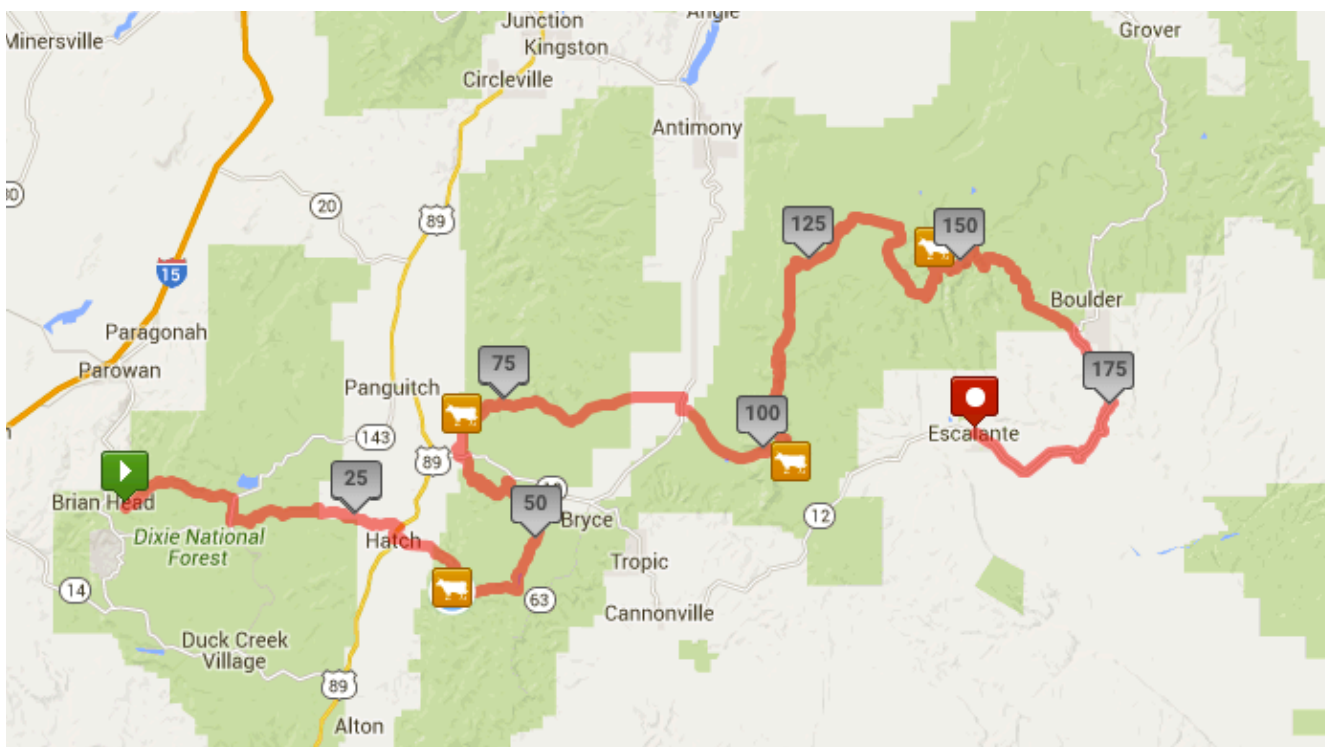
Describe how the proposal adds value to the funds requested by private and government entities: The region already has local invested business operators and organizations that welcome trails-based tourism. Garfield County Tourism Council has officially endorsed the proposal for the Aquarius Trail and hut system and other counties have also indicated their support for this trails-based project. Outdoor recreation continues to attract more investment annually and the local operators are the keys to success. These businesses and organizations will ensure the future of Color County as economically sound and are already motivated to aid strategic infrastructure, as mentioned in this proposal. The local mountain bike community is willing and excited to be part of a regional plan to grow the trail network and attract a larger audience from all over the US and the globe. Increasing the trail network, offering multi-day cycling/walking trips and packaging this new local content with the iconic destinations surrounding the Aquarius Trail and Hut to Hut System is a win/win for Utah and this localized economy.

Outline whether the proposed use would be complementary or in conflict with any existing uses: The footprint of this trail already exists, is relatively small and easily maneuvered once all considerations have been investigated. A hut to hut trail system, toilets and other facilities will be complimentary to all existing trail users, as well as any new proposed 4WD, horse or walking trail networks. It also could be a life saver SES and fire safety workers in the area. Given the landscape and the open canvas of this proposal there is no reason why any potential conflict cannot be averted through early and decisive communication.



Figure 5 Hosting Recreational Opportunities

Proposed Route – A designated trail, 175 miles on dirt through Color County. This route was designed by Escape Adventures patterned after the Brian and the Bullfrog Tour which was designed in 1992. This route is 175 miles from Brianhead Peak, Utah to Escalante, Utah. Almost entirely dirt with single-track options throughout the route - some part of the route and others optional to the route. The route travels approximately 40 miles per day and is designed to end each day at a hut that would overlook fantastic scenery across the Aquarius Plateau.



Proposed Hut Locations-

Hut Info: 4 Huts; each comes stocked with Kitchen, Bunk Beds, Stoves, cooking facilities, food, sleeping bags, water, shower, phone charging station, deck, chairs, etc.

Hut Locations: 1. Proctor Canyon/Sunset Cliffs, Hatch 2. Red Canyon, Dixie National Forest, Panguitch 3. Powell Point (halfway between Barney Top and Powell Point), Ruby's Inn, 4. Cow Puncher Guard Station (between Escalante and Boulder) 4a. Hells Backbone

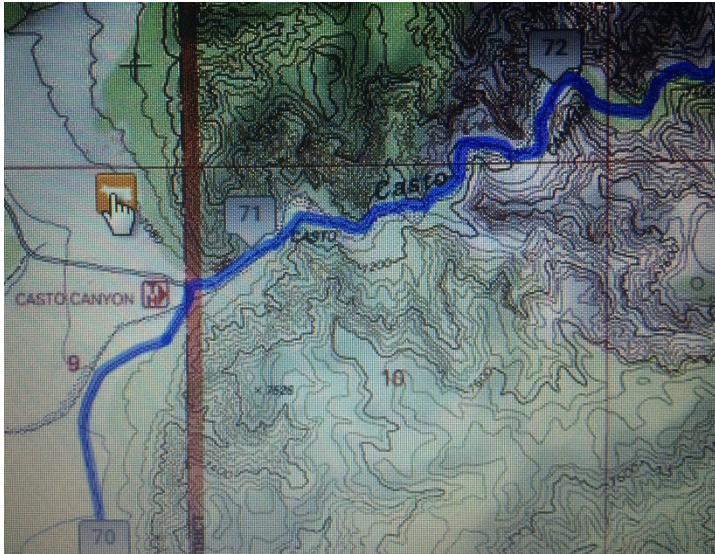


Figure 6 Casto Canyon Hut

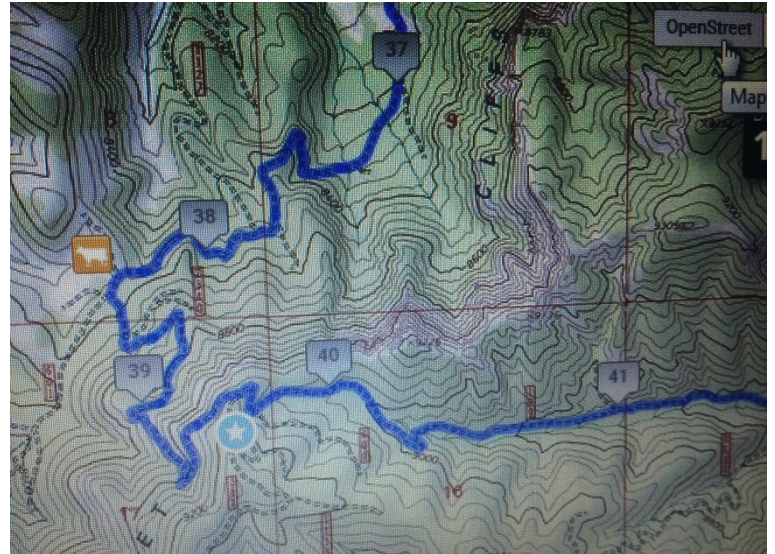


Figure 7 Proctor Canyon Hut

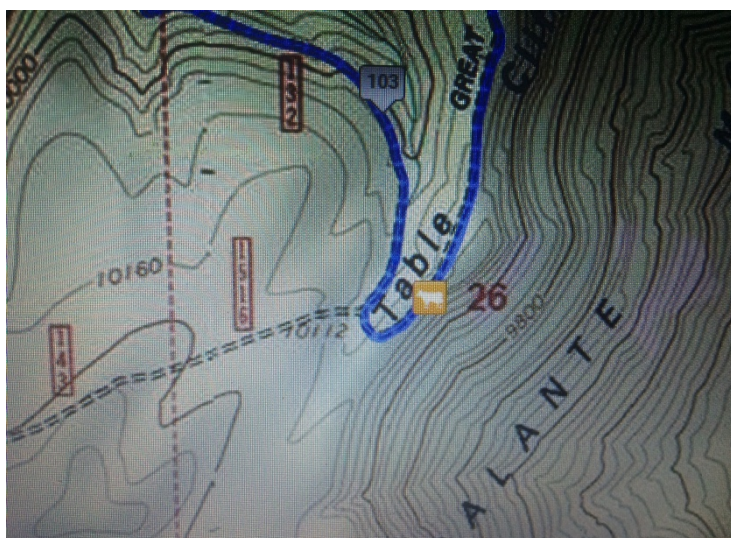


Figure 8 Powell Point Hut

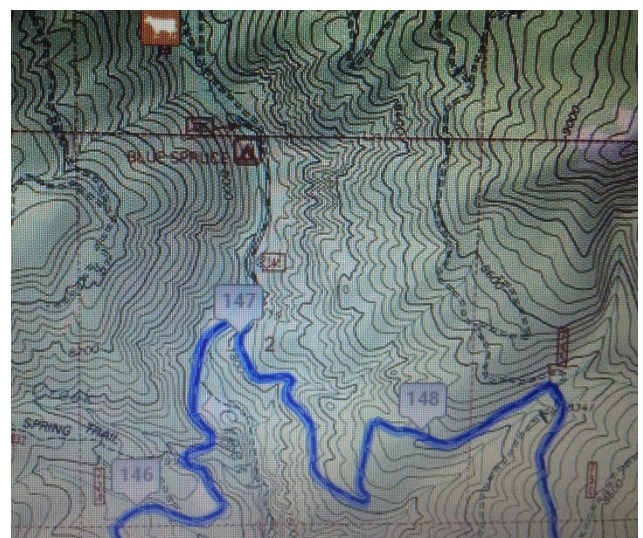


Figure 9 Hells Backbone Hut

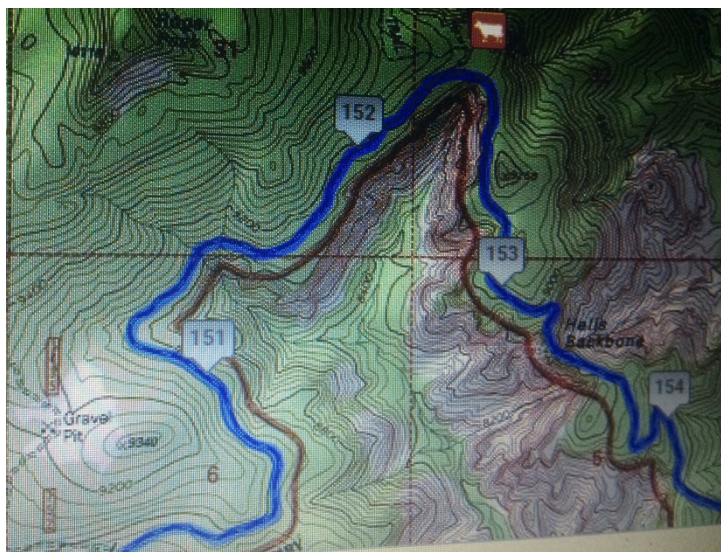
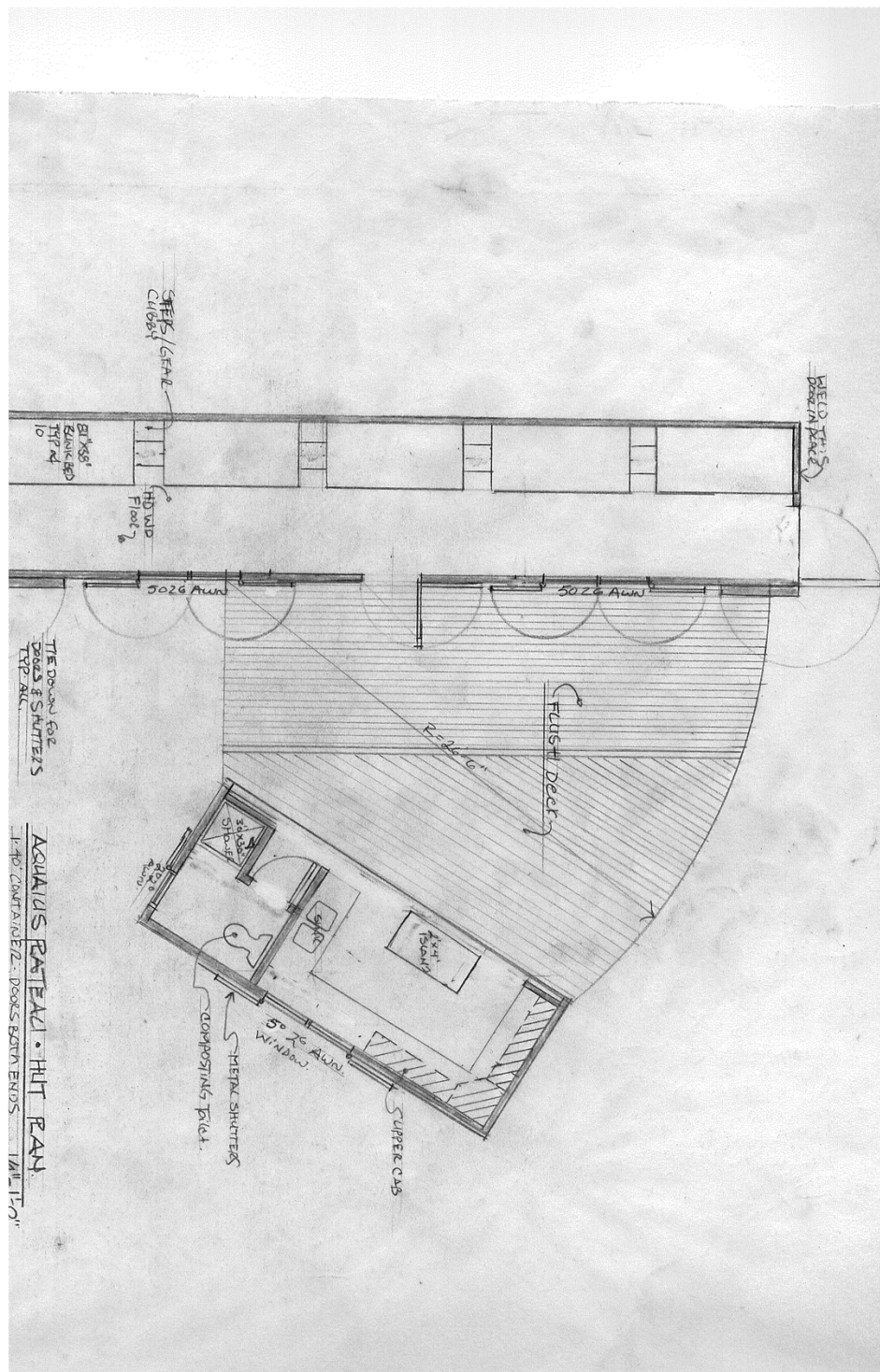
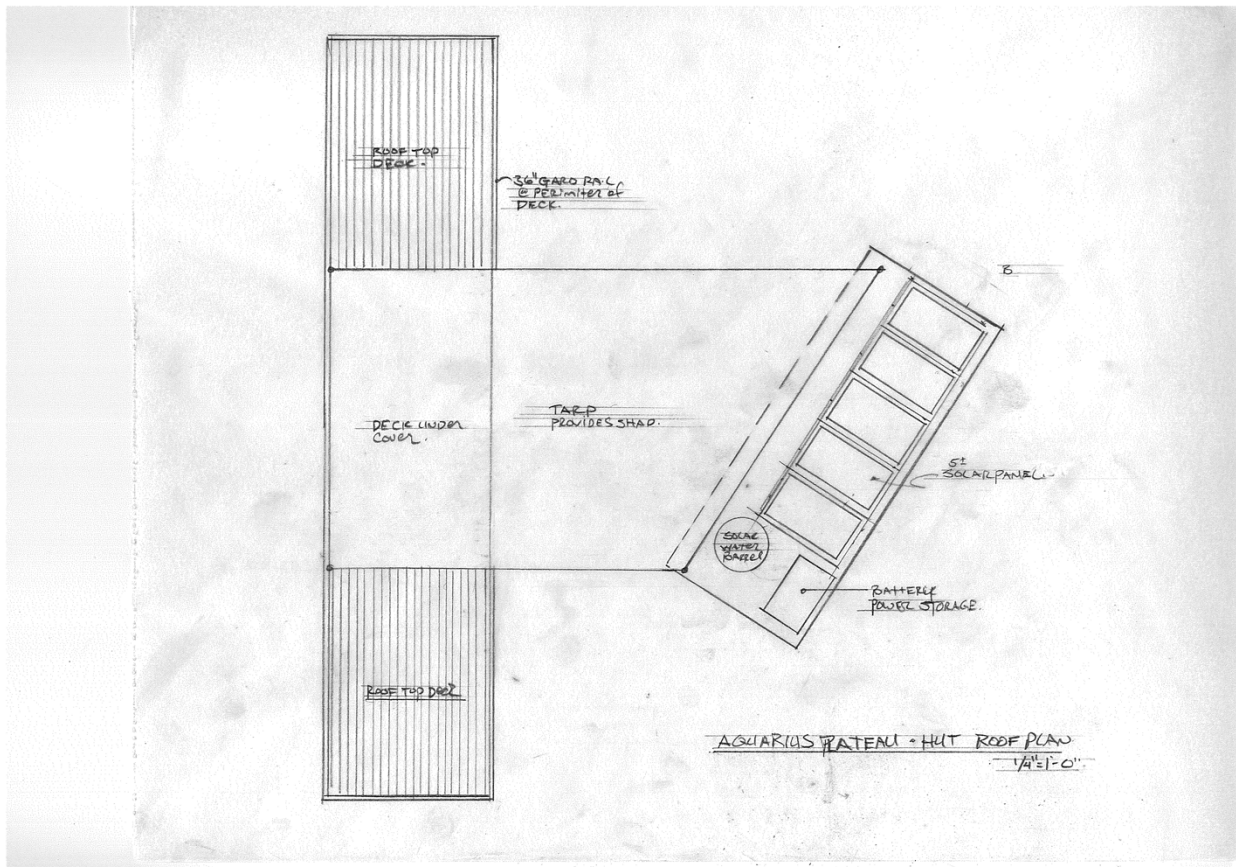


Figure 10 Alternate Hells Backbone Hut

Proposed Hut Specs-





Drawings & specs prepared by Jan Burton of [Rhino Cubed](#)



escape adventures®

Proposal prepared by Jared Fisher & Brittany Phelps